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SUBJECT: JULY 15 LAVALAS DEMONSTRATION IS PEACEFUL

REF: A) P-au-P 1278, B) P-au-P 1279, C) P-au-P 1281

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The widely-publicized July 15 Lavalas demonstration (reftels) attracted 5,000-6,000 supporters to a peaceful protest at the National Palace (presidency). There were no reports of any attempts at violence by the demonstrators. MINUSTAH and Haitian National Police (HNP) units provided a show of force in the downtown area, especially at the Palace. Protesters called for the return of Aristide and payment/reinstatement of Lavalasiens fired from government jobs. The Lavalas supporters showed greater organizational ability than they have in recent months, but posed no threat either to the Preval government or to the ability of MINUSTAH and the HNP to maintain order. End summary.

¶2. (U) Lavalas supporters began to gather at approximately 1100 at Aristides former residence in the Tabarre neighborhood. A group estimated at several hundred by the respected local radio station Radio Metropole held a voodoo-influenced ceremony at the residence and then proceeded toward Cite Soleil, according to the Embassy local staff eye-witnesses. HNP forces did not pursue them into Cite Soleil, but picked them up again when they emerged in the early afternoon, now with larger numbers, in the adjacent Bel Air neighborhood.

¶3. (U) In preparation for the demonstration, MINUSTAH had increased its presence in the city. At approximately 0930, RSO witnessed a MINUSTAH patrol that included UN peacekeepers as well as a Formed Police Unit (apparently an African contingent) operating in the downtown area, headed

adad toward Cite Soleil. MINUSTAH and HNP deployed at the Palace beginning mid-morning, setting up saw-horse type barricades and APCs to prevent protesters from gathering immediately in front of the presidency building. MINUSTAH helicopters flew above the city center to monitor the protests during the day.

¶4. (U) After picking up additional supporters in Cite Soleil and Bel Air, the protesters numbered 5,000 6,000 (according to independent MINUSTAH and Embassy local-staff eyewitness estimates) by the time they finally arrived at the Palace at approximately 1330. MINUSTAH and HNP barricades two blocks north of the Palace were breached without violence and demonstrators gathered in front of the Palace. Brazilian troops took up positions on the Palace lawn in case of any attempt to breach the perimeter. The protesters chanted slogans demanding the return of Aristide and payment/reinstatement of Lavalas members fired from government jobs. The demonstration broke up without

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incident around 1430. The entire event was peaceful, with no reports of any attempts at violence.

¶5. (SBU) Preval and senior members of his team remained at the Palace throughout the morning and during the protest. The Ambassador spoke with Preval confidant Bob Manuel, who confirmed that he, along with Prime Minister Alexis and other cabinet members, was with the President. MINUSTAH SRSG Mulet met with Preval and his team mid-morning. Mulet found them nervous about the unfolding events but determined to remain at the Palace and confident of the ability of MINUSTAH at the HNP to maintain order. Mulet and Manuel both praised MINUSTAH/HNP coordination.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The Lavalas supporters were more successful this time in organizing this protest than they have been in their recent similar efforts. Yet, this peaceful demonstration posed no threat to Preval's government or to the ability of MINUSTAH and the HNP to maintain order. We hope Preval will draw the same conclusion and deal more assertively with the Lavalasiens in the future. End comment.